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ABSTRACT

Individuals such as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. successfully employed nonviolent strategies to attain significant political goals. Despite the implications of these achievements, psychologists rarely have studied predispositions to nonviolent behavior empirically. This study investigated the relationships among nonviolent personality predispositions, moral reasoning, and values among adolescents and adults in the western United States. Nonviolent predispositions were interpreted in terms of their relationships with the universal motivational domains of values and principled reasoning. Recommendations are made for future research on nonviolent personality predispositions. A 24-item list of references is included. (Author/DB)

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Nonviolence, Values, and Moral Reasoning: Empirical Support for Theoretical Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Individuals, such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, have successfully employed nonviolent strategies to attain significant political goals. Despite the implications of their achievements, psychologists have rarely studied predispositions to nonviolent behavior empirically. This study investigated the relationships among nonviolent personality predispositions (The Nonviolence Test, Kool & Sen, 1984), moral reasoning (Defining Issues Test, Rest, 1986), and values (Values Questionnaire, Schwartz, In press) among adolescents and adults in the western U.S. Nonviolent predispositions are interpreted in terms of their relationships with the universal motivational domains of values and principled reasoning. Recommendations are made for future research on nonviolent personality predispositions.

Nonviolence, Values, and Moral Reasoning: Empirical Support for Theoretical Relationships

A considerable amount of research within the social psychological literature has focused on the topics of aggression and violence. These topics are an integral part of most introductory psychology textbooks and courses as well as social psychology textbooks and courses. Unfortunately, nonviolence, a related but more positively focused topic, has not received as much attention. This is particularly troublesome given the undeniable potential for the application of the psychology of nonviolence to such numerous societal problems as child abuse, spouse abuse, and violent crimes which have all been on the increase in recent times. The relevance of nonviolent behavior to global and regional peace issues and related policy is also noteworthy.

Gandhi's Philosophy of Nonviolence

Individuals, such as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, have successfully employed nonviolent strategies to attain significant political goals. What is meant by nonviolence in this context? Based on the writings and teachings of Gandhi, the definition of nonviolence seems to have several consistent components. Nonviolence means more than the absence of violence in that it encompasses a philosophy and a general strategy predisposition for conflict resolution (Pelton, 1974). The philosophy inherent in nonviolent means of conflict resolution is

based on the Gandhian concepts of *satyagraha*, *ahimsa*, and *tapasya* (Bose, 1987; Nakhre, 1982).

Satyagraha literally means "holding on to the truth" (Nakhre, 1982, p. 2). As Nakhre points out, however, in order to hold on to the truth, it is essential to discover it first. Therefore, to be successful, *satyagraha* must be an active technique of conflict resolution which consists of a search for truth and a struggle for its vindication. The difficulty of discovering the truth or the establishment of the "correct values" within a conflict situation is the subjective perception of each party involved. Thus, the truth one discovers is of necessity a relative truth based on the social context of each person.

While the goal of *satyagraha* is the discovery of truth, *ahimsa* is the means to achieve it (Nakhre, 1982). *Ahimsa* literally translates to noninjury. Pelton (1974) indicates that in a broader sense *ahimsa* can be taken to mean active goodwill or love and is predicated upon the belief in the sacredness of life. He points out that *ahimsa* is also an action based refusal to do harm or to allow harm or injustice to exist anywhere in the world.

Nakhre (1982) interprets *tapasya*, the last principle in Gandhi's system of *satyagraha*, to be self-suffering. This concept is predicated on the realization that the truth of the nonviolent activist may be further from the "real truth" than the

truth of the opponent's values. Given this awareness, nonviolent activists are more willing to endure suffering themselves than to inflict it upon their opponents within a conflict situation. Pelton (1974) points to additional implications of the principle of self-suffering. Voluntary suffering appeals to the conscience of one's adversary often eliciting sympathy and further dramatizing the alleged injustice. The nonviolent activist also believes that, since violence often begets violence, the willingness to endure self-suffering instead of inflicting suffering on others will result in the least amount of suffering and the least total loss of life.

Predispositions to Nonviolence

Decades after the deaths of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, the role of organized nonviolence and nonviolent behavior has not received the attention it deserves (Boulding, 1990). Despite the implications of the achievements of nonviolent people in seeking political goals, psychologists have rarely studied predispositions to nonviolent behavior empirically.

What differentiates individuals with predispositions to nonviolent behavior from individuals predisposed to violence? While empirical data is relatively scarce, there have been several noteworthy attempts to characterize and to better understand nonviolent and violent persons based on case studies (e.g. Erikson, 1969; Nakhre, 1982; Rappoport, 1990) and the

application of psychological theory and principles (e.g. Bondurant, 1965; Pelton, 1974). Kool and Sen (1984) developed a psychometric instrument to identify individuals who are predisposed to nonviolent methods of conflict resolution. This research and further research by Kool and Keyes (1990) have shown this instrument to be reliable and valid in differentiating individuals with a predisposition for nonviolence from those with a predisposition to violence in a variety of cross-national contexts.

This paper attempts to use the instrument developed by Kool and Sen (1984) to begin to determine what distinguishes individuals with predispositions to nonviolent behavior from individuals predisposed to violence. Since the essence of the Gandhian approach to the use of nonviolence to resolve conflict (as outlined earlier in this paper) involves values and moral development special attention will be given to values and moral reasoning. Therefore, the first purpose of the research reported here is to apply recent value theory to determine which value structures differentiate individuals predisposed to nonviolent conflict resolution strategies or from those predisposed to more violent strategies. The second purpose is to determine if individuals predisposed to nonviolent means to resolve conflict utilize higher levels of principled moral reasoning than those predisposed to more violent means.

Values and Nonviolence

Values are enduring prescriptive or proscriptive beliefs that specific modes of conduct or end-states of existence are preferred to other modes of conduct or end-states (Rokeach, 1973). Empirical research has consistently shown human values to be significantly related to both attitudes and behaviors (e.g. Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984; Rokeach, 1979). Schwartz and Bilsky (1987, 1990) have proposed and provided considerable empirical support for a universal psychological structure of human values. Recently, Schwartz (In press) expanded these universal motivational domains for values to ten. These value domains are power, tradition, hedonism, stimulation, security, conformity, self-direction, benevolence, universalism, and achievement.

Three of the ten value domains encompass values which seem to be inherent within the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence. We hypothesize that individuals predisposed to nonviolent methods of conflict resolution would place higher priorities on the value domains of universalism, benevolence, and conformity.

The universalism domain is defined to reflect the understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature. Values within the universalism domain include social justice, broadminded, a world at peace, wisdom, unity with nature, protecting the environment, and equality. The character of the *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* involves the discovery of truth (i.e. the value of wisdom), the

desire to avoid and alleviate the world of injustice (i.e. the value of social justice), and the refusal to do harm (i.e. the value of a world at peace).

The value domain of benevolence focuses on the preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact. Values within this domain include being helpful, forgiving, honest, and loyal. The value domain of conformity is defined as the restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms. Values within the conformity domain include obedience, self-discipline, politeness, and honoring parents and elders. We predicted both these value domains will differentiate individuals with nonviolent and violent predispositions because of the importance of the values of forgiving and self-discipline are important for the self-suffering and restraint needed in responding in a nonviolent way to a violent adversary.

Moral Reasoning and Nonviolence

Numerous individuals have suggested or implied that the consistent use of nonviolent means to resolve conflict is a moral issue (e.g. Nakhre, 1982; Pelton, 1974). The pursuit of truth and the concern for moral values such as social justice suggest that individuals predisposed to nonviolent conflict resolution would exhibit higher levels of moral reasoning.

Despite these predictions, Keniston (1990) and Kool & Keyes

(1990) failed to identify significant relationships between predispositions to nonviolence and preferences for advanced levels of moral reasoning using the Defining Issues Test. This study replicated these earlier studies to determine the robustness of their results.

METHOD

This study investigated differences between individuals predisposed to nonviolent methods of conflict resolution and those predisposed to violent means of conflict resolution. Participants completed three different instruments assessing nonviolent personality predispositions (The Nonviolence Test, Kool & Sen, 1984), moral reasoning (Defining Issues Test, Rest, 1986), and values (Values Questionnaire, Schwartz, In press).

Participants

The sample for this study included both adolescent and adult age groups. The adolescent participants were 102 students selected from two high schools in the North central region of rural Idaho during December 1991 and May 1992. Adult participants were 65 students enrolled in an undergraduate psychology course at a small state supported college in the Pacific Northwest during the Fall Semester 1991 and Spring Semester 1992. The demographic characteristics of the sample is depicted in Table 1.

Instruments

The Nonviolence Test (NVT) is a 65 item forced choice scale

developed by Kool and Sen (1984). Raw scores can range from 0 to 36 and are obtained by omitting the 29 filler items and summing the number of nonviolent responses to the remaining 36 items. Higher scores indicate stronger tendencies to use nonviolent strategies to solve conflict situations. Low scores indicate a tendency to use violent or aggressive responses. The NVT has a test-retest reliability of .81 and an alpha reliability of .82 (Kool & Sen, 1984). The validity of the NVT has been demonstrated using known group and concurrent methods (Kool & Keyes, 1990; Kool & Sen, 1984).

The Values Questionnaire is a 56 item scale in which respondents indicate how important values are for them as a guiding principle in their life on a nine point scale (Schwartz, In press). Subscores can be obtained to identify ten universal motivational domains for values.

The Defining Issues Test (DIT) is one of the most systematically validated measures of moral reasoning available (Rest, 1979, 1986, 1990). It is based on Kohlberg's (1984; Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) stage theory of moral reasoning. The DIT presents six dilemmas to respondents and offers a multiple choice format of selecting responses. The choices following each dilemma represent the full range of Kohlberg's stages and have been equalized in length and complexity of vocabulary. The most widely used and validated summary score of the DIT is the P percent score. The P% score represents the relative importance

that the subject imparts to morally principled responses to the 6 presented dilemmas. The DIT has established levels of test-retest reliability (high .70s and .80s) and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha in high .70s) (Rest, 1979, 1990). Rest also reviews a variety of validity studies, addressing face validity, criterion group differences, longitudinal change, convergent-divergent correlations, experimental enhancement, resistance to faking, and internal structure (1979, 1986, 1990).

RESULTS

Participants with nonviolent and violent predispositions were identified as having scores on the NVT which were at least one standard deviation above the sample mean (30) and at least one standard deviation below the sample mean (16), respectively. The NVT scores for the 27 individuals in the nonviolent group ranged from 30 to 35 with a mean of 31.44 and a standard deviation of 1.53. The NVT scores for the 26 individuals in the violent group ranged from 4 to 16 with a mean of 12.69 and a standard deviation of 2.90.

Eleven univariate t-tests were computed to assess the differences between the group with strong nonviolent predispositions and the group with strong violent predispositions. The means and standard deviations on the ten value domains and the moral development score for the groups predisposed to nonviolent and violent methods of conflict resolution along with the results of the t-tests are presented in

Table 2. A total of five of the value domain differences reached statistical significance. The difference between the two groups on the P % principle reasoning score did not reach significant levels.

Individuals who expressed strong nonviolent predispositions placed significantly higher priorities on the benevolence value domain, the universalism value domain and the conformity value domain. Individuals who expressed strong violent predispositions placed significantly higher priorities on the power and the hedonism value domains. While there was a trend for individuals with strong nonviolent predispositions to respond with more principled reasoning as measured by the P% score on the DIT, the differences did not reach statistical significance ($p = .135$).

DISCUSSION

Considerable empirical support for Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent action was generated by this study. As predicted from Gandhi's philosophy, individuals who expressed predispositions to engage in nonviolent strategies for conflict resolution placed higher priorities on the values within the universalism and benevolence value domains. Nonviolent individuals in this study valued the preservation and enhancement for the welfare of those around them plus expressed an appreciation, tolerance, and need to protect the welfare of all people and nature. This is clearly consistent with belief in the sacredness of life and the refusal to do harm which are key components of *ahimsa* (Pelton,

1974).

Differences on the conformity domain between those predisposed to nonviolent and violent responses to conflict are also consistent with the Gandhian concept of *tapasya*. Nonviolent individuals in this study placed higher priorities on the restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others than did the violent group. This is a fundamental value domain if an individual is to willingly engage in the self-suffering needed in the implementation of Gandhi's nonviolent action.

Two additional value domains differentiated individuals predisposed to nonviolence from those predisposed to violence. Respondents predisposed to violent conflict resolution strategies placed higher priorities on the power and hedonism value domains. Those predisposed to violent responses were more concerned about social status and prestige, the control and dominance over people and resources, and pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself than the nonviolent group.

The value domains more important to those with nonviolent predispositions reflect the collectivism dimension of the structure of values (Schwartz, 1990). Conversely, the value domains more important to those with more violent predispositions are individualistic.

This study identified no statistically significant differences between nonviolently and violently predisposed

individuals on levels of moral reasoning. This corroborates earlier research by Keniston (1990) and Kool & Keyes (1990) who also failed to identify significant relationships between predispositions to nonviolence and preferences for advanced levels of moral reasoning. It is interesting to note that in all three studies, the trends of the findings were as predicted; however, the power of the statistical tests were severally limited due to small sample sizes. While it is unlikely that moral reasoning will be a major differentiating variable for nonviolent behavior tendencies, perhaps future research with larger samples will identify a small but significant impact.

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Age	
Mean	20.88
Median	19.0
Standard Deviation	6.28
Range	16 - 49
Sex	
Female	69.3 %
Male	30.7 %
Ethnic Background	
White/Caucasian	93.3 %
Native American Indian	1.8 %
Asian American	1.8 %
Other	3.0 %

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Individuals Predisposed to Nonviolence and Violence

Variable	Predisposition: Nonviolent	Predisposition: Violent	t
Value Domain			
Power	1.87 (1.3)	2.96 (1.5)	-2.28 *
Tradition	3.33 (1.2)	2.81 (1.0)	1.42
Hedonism	3.97 (1.5)	5.05 (1.4)	-2.26 *
Stimulation	5.24 (1.2)	4.77 (1.1)	1.30
Security	4.53 (.99)	4.36 (.92)	0.55
Conformity	4.90 (1.1)	3.94 (.98)	2.82 **
Self-Direction	4.93 (1.0)	4.93 (1.0)	0.01
Benevolence	5.25 (1.3)	4.25 (1.1)	2.56 *
Universalism	4.94 (.79)	4.10 (.99)	2.75 **
Achievement	5.24 (1.2)	4.77 (1.1)	1.30
Moral Development			
DIT - P% Score	38.61 (12.7)	29.63 (13.0)	1.55

* significant at .05 level ** significant at .01 level